



Censorship and Responsibility in the Arts

Week Six: Responsibility

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Agenda

- Present some traditional and contemporary philosophical theories on selfhood, freedom, and responsibility
- Discuss the practical implications of these theories
- Invite you to consider how these theories might influence censorship policies and practices



Key Points

- Selfhood
- Freedom
- Individual Responsibility
- Collective Responsibility
- Case Studies
- Implications for Censorship Policy and Practice



Traditional Ideas of Selfhood

- Enlightenment or sovereign ideal (Descartes)
- Humans as autonomous, rational, and relatively free subjects capable of will and power to exert causal force
- Conventional “ontopolitical” basis for liberal responsibility (Connolly, 1995)



Discussion

- Does the sovereign ideal seem empirically true to you?
- If it is true, what are its socio-political consequences (e.g., what sorts of institutions does it foster)?
- If it is false, what other models might better account for human agency?



Modern Ideas of Selfhood

Subjectivity

“An abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, either as objects of need, desire and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience.”

(Mansfield, 2000)



Modern Ideas of Selfhood

- Sovereign ideal is rejected and replaced with various theories of subjectivity
- Subject understood as a non-autonomous cultural construct
- Essentialist view: Subject is an objective, knowable, quantifiable *thing* (Freud)
- Non-essentialist view: Subject is both a mutable *effect* of and *vehicle* for socio-cultural power relations (Nietzsche, Foucault)



Postmodern/Postliberal Wisdom

“There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.”

Friedrich Nietzsche
On the Genealogy of Morals

“I do indeed believe there is no sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of subject to be found everywhere. I am very sceptical of this view of the subject and very hostile to it.”

Michel Foucault
Politics, Philosophy, Culture



Discussion

- Does the idea of an essential subject seem empirically true to you?
- What about the idea of a non-essential subject?
- Which idea seems to be most widely accepted nowadays?
- What are the socio-political consequences of each idea?



Traditional Ideas of Freedom

- An essential ontological state
- A natural right
- Something restricted by society in return for certain benefits (contract)
- Other ideas?



Contemporary Ideas of Freedom

- Not an essential ontological state or natural right
- An ongoing product or effect of socio-cultural power relations
- Always relative and subject to change
- Co-existent with the unfreedom produced by contemporary orders of discipline, domination, regulation, and exploitation (Brown, 1995)



Selfhood + Freedom = Responsibility

Responsibility (*noun*):

- The quality or state of being responsible
- Moral, legal, or mental accountability
- Reliability, trustworthiness
- Something for which one is responsible (burden or duty)
- Not a possession but something that constitutes us (Connolly, 1993)



Individual Responsibility

- Theory: Because we are sovereign individuals with the freedom and power to act as we like, we should be held morally responsible for our actions (free will)
- Counter-theory: Because we are subjects and lack the freedom and power to act as we like, we cannot be held entirely responsible for our actions (fate, God, genetics, neurochemistry, culture, family, environment, karma, predestination, determinism)
- Other theories?



Discussion

“Responsibility and punishment are related.”

“Assigning responsibility – whether it comes in the form of blame or praise – is extremely important in disciplinary societies.”

“*Accurately* assigning responsibility for a particular act, event, or cultural phenomenon can be a very complicated matter.”



Two Case Studies

- Case Study 1: Discrete Event
- Case Study 2: Cultural Phenomenon



Case Study 1: Australia Loses the Ashes

“I think everyone will be looking for people to blame.”

James Sutherland, CEO
Cricket Australia

Case Study 1: Australia Loses the Ashes

- Ricky Ponting, Captain
- Tim Nielsen, Coach
- National Selection Panel
- Systemic problems in Cricket Australia
- The Oval's groundskeeper
- Brad Haddin's broken finger
- Brett Lee's unfitness
- Mitchell Johnson's personal problems
- Andrew Symond's personal problems
- Inordinately high expectations
- Climate change
- England had a better team

Case Study 2: Dexter

- Serial killers are responsible for 800 deaths annually in U.S. (Missen, 2000)
- Serial killers are influenced by many factors, not one, which snow-ball to create his or her existence (Hickey, 1991)
- Serial murder occurs mostly in advanced consumer societies (U.S., U.K., Australia) with specific socio-economic attributes
- Is society responsible?



Case Study 2: Dexter's Biography

- Citizen of present-day Miami
- History of severe childhood trauma (PTSD)
- Raised in single-parent household
- Adoptive father was a police officer
- Loose (?) ties to peers, family, community



Case Study 2: Dexter's Culture

- Significant counter culture
- High prison population
- Post-imperial heritage
- Densely populated urban centres
- Ongoing socio-economic transformation
- Great expectations of consumerism



Case Study 2: Dexter

- Is Dexter good or bad?
- Is Dexter an autonomous moral agent?
- Is Dexter solely responsible for his acts?
- Are his acts worthy of punishment?
- Is society to blame for creating Dexter?



Collective Responsibility

- Individual subjects are products of culture
- Rule-governed, highly structured collectives can be considered moral agents (Copp, 1984)
- Collectives (corporations, strata associations, government agencies, nations) can and *should* be held legally responsible for certain acts
- James Hardie Case

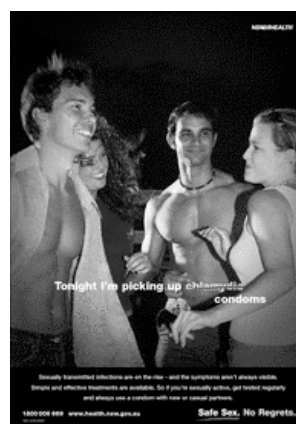
Collective Responsibility

“Liberal institutions have a responsibility to help individuals become responsible subjects.”

“Because the media is the primary interface between individuals and cultural institutions it has an obligation not only to *act* responsibly but to *promote* responsibility.”

Media-Based Promotion of Responsibility

- Smoking
- Sexual Health
- Alcohol
- Fitness
- Nutrition
- Swimming
- Sunscreen
- Others?



An Alternative Viewpoint...

- In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche associates unfreedom with liberal institutions, arguing their tendency to turn individuals into herd animals
- Foucault makes a similar observation in *Discipline and Punish*, arguing that modern liberal institutions tend to fabricate docile-useful bodies



Implications for Censorship Policy and Practice

“Censorship is an effective practical means to help ensure individuals become responsible (moral) subjects.”